The Orhun Valley script

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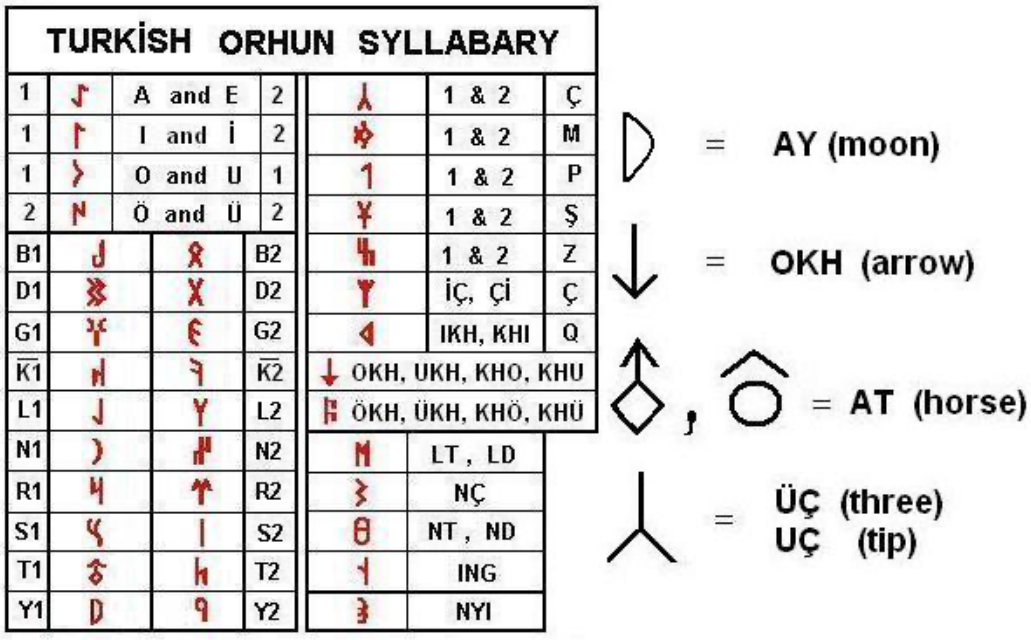
The Orhun Valley script is found on several inscribed steles of Central Asia. Below we see the stele of Bilge Kagan (The wise ruler) inscribed with Turkish "runic" characters. It is claimed that this syllabary dates from the 8th century AD. But such a sophisticated script, fully adapted to transmit the ancient Turkish language, cannot start on the 8th century AD. There are several other examples found in the region belonging to earlier dates. As we examine this script in detail we see that it contains many clues indicating its close relationship to the ancient Proto-language of Central Asia.

Bilge Kagan stele with a stylised ibex seal at the top. (From the Orhun valley).

It was Vilhelm Thomsen (1842 – 1927) a Danish linguist, who first identified this script as being ancient Turkish (1). He published his decipherment in 1896 under the title **Inscriptions of Orchon Deciphered.** I am of the opinion that the correct name of the valley in which these inscriptions were found is **Orhun** and not **Orchon** or **Orhon**. This is because "Or" means high and "Hun" is a well known Central Asiatic nation that migrated towards the west. The Orhun syllabary (below) has some special features which are not found in any other script. Scholars call it the **Turkish runic script** because of its similarity to the Scandinavian runes. This relationship, which is the consequence of the Hun expansion, will be discussed in the future chapters. For the moment let us concentrate on the Orhun syllabary (2).

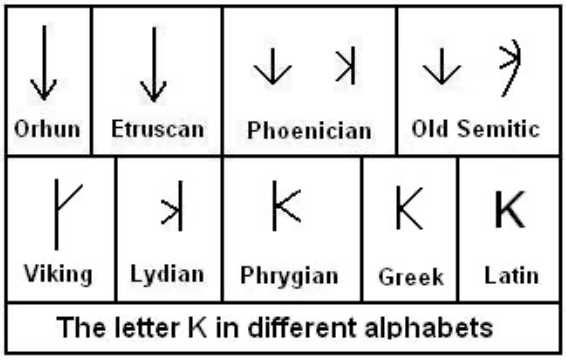
This script contains 8 vowels separated in two groups, indicated with 1 and 2 in the Table below (see previous Chapters 20 and 2). These groups were formed according to the sound harmony inherent in the Turkish language. Because of the 38 characters of the script we call it a syllabary and not an alphabet. The syllabary contains special characters, such as **ç** (tchea), **ş** (shea), **yng**, **ynch** and **ynd** that are specific to Turkish. These characters are not later additions to the script, as some scholars believe, but make part of the syllabary from the very early start, which may be several millennia BP.

The characters of this syllabary are specifically designed to transmit the monosyllabic words of the Central Asiatic Proto-language. Therefore, each character is a word and most of these characters have a visual correspondence with the meaning it represents, as shown below.

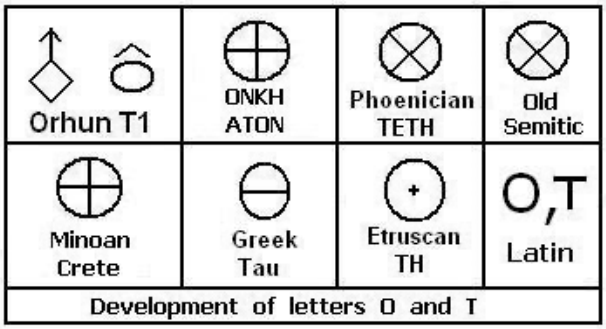


When the T1 seal is read as **at** (horse) a symbolic representation of a rider on a horse appears. We have already seen that the Okh leader is an adult person carrying an arrow and riding a horse. This symbolism of uniting rider and horse has also a special meaning. It conveys the message that the rider and his horse are fused together and should not be separated at any cost, even after death.

The word standing for "arrow" in Turkish is **ok**, as mentioned on several occasions before. As soon as humans started hunting they developed first the spear and then the bow and arrow. Considering this fact we can safely assume that the **T1** and the **OKH** character were among the earliest signs of the pictographic writing system. They appeared first on the seals of the Proto-language and later on transgressed into several scripts, from the Central Asiatic early Uighur script to several alphabets, to finally end up in the Latin alphabet. The modern **K** as well as the **O** and the **T** are transformed forms of the T1 seal. Below we see how the arrow seal gave rise to the Latin K.



The T1 seal can be pronounced not only as "At" but also as "Ot" (sun or fire) and "On" (venerable, important). We have seen in Chapter 6 several examples of the **Onkh** seal. Considering that the words for horse (at) and ancestor (ata) stem from the same origin, it is not difficult to see that the fusion of **ata** with **on** give Ata-On or **Aton** the sun-god of the Egyptians during the reign of **Akhenaton** (3). This pharaoh name seems to be made out of syllables originating from the Central Asiatic Proto-language: **Okh-Han-Ata-On** "The universal Okh ancestor and leader". More details on this name will be elaborated in the next chapter. Below we see that there were two versions of the T1 seal in the ancient script. These forms have a close relationship to the **Onkh / Ankh** seal which eventually gave rise to the letters O and T (see Chapter 6, **The universal symbols**).



Development of letters O and T

References

(1) Ref. Of Chapter 10, page 285.
(2) Orhon Yazıtları, Talat Tekin, ISBN 975-16-0065-0, Ankara, 1988.
(3) Ancient Egypitian Myths and Legends, Lewis Spence, page 329, General Publishing Company, 1990, Toronto, Canada.

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